

# Queer Stories of Europe



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Edited by

Kārlis Vērdiņš and Jānis Ozoliņš

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

KĀRLIS VĒRDIŅŠ AND JĀNIS OZOLIŅŠ

This volume brings together scholars from several European countries whose work investigates various representations of queer culture over a period of more than one hundred years—namely the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century. This century saw, on one hand, the modernization of attitudes towards sexuality as well as emancipation and recognition of LGBT people, but on the other hand, the creation of totalitarian regimes that tried to erase this category of people from everybody's consciousness both ideologically and physically.

This is the first volume on this subject that presents the history of the Baltic region among other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The editors of the book encountered the same challenges as, for example, the editors of *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945* (2014), who found it extremely difficult to arrange their chapters, dedicated to various European metropolises, in a particular “logical” order. Attempts to systematize the multilayered historical material of each location did not follow the dictates of such an arrangement.<sup>1</sup> Although that highly valuable book includes chapters dedicated to Moscow, Ljubljana, Budapest and Helsinki, other urban queer cultures of Central and Eastern Europe are not represented. Another recent collection of articles, *What's Queer About Europe?* (2014), looks at the countries of this region only because they participated in the Eurovision song contest.<sup>2</sup> The guide *Queer Prague* (2014) written by four Czech scholars can be regarded as a swift response to such omissions,<sup>3</sup> and it includes 100 places connected to the city's queer past.

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<sup>1</sup> Cook, Matt and Evans, Jennifer V. (eds.). *Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe since 1945*. London – New York: Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 1–12.

<sup>2</sup> Rosello, Mireille and Dasgupta, Sudeep (eds.). *What's Queer About Europe?* Fordham University Press, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Seidl, Jan, Weiniger, Ruth Jochanan, Zikmund-Lender, Ladislav, Nozar, Lukáš. *Queer Prague: A Guide to the LGBT History of the Czech Capital, 1380–2000*. Brno: Černé pole, 2014.

Despite the geographical and thematic variety of the present volume, it still has some uniting elements. First of all, its central field is literature and literary culture—the written word that until recently was the most important medium for exchanging ideas and preserving information. Other media have played their roles in queer history as well—the visual arts, cinema, video art and TV etc. Although a significant part of our volume is dedicated to literature, many of the authors in this book view the central question from the perspectives of history, art history, culture studies, communication studies, theology, narratology, etc.

A varying historical experience determines the theoretical framework and social context of contemporary research work in each European country. In the United Kingdom and Germany, on the one hand, it is possible to talk about the central question because here the LGBT community is more or less integrated into a society that advocates its rights whereas, on the other hand, Ukrainian queer culture is extremely provocative to the majority of Ukrainian society. Taking into account these differences, we use the word “queer” as an umbrella term that deals with all kinds of non-normative sexuality, even covering periods of the past when other designations were used.

Historically, since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Germany has been a pioneering country in the research field of sexuality. The issue of homosexuality was made visible there relatively early. Thus, nations close to German culture also experienced the presence of gay movement activists in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, in the Baltic provinces and other areas which were part of the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as far as we know, gay movements were not established until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This volume is one of the first attempts to address the queer elements of Baltic history.

In the last twenty-five years, Western theories of sexuality and gender have entered the academic research of Central and Eastern Europe. The ideas of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and others have influenced scholars in various countries and fields of interest. Their concepts have turned into a kind of language that has become a shared basis of queer studies. Nevertheless, the experience of LGBT activism or the presence of queer studies is still quite different to that of the West. While Western scholars have already produced an exhaustive amount of publications concerning the historical heritage of their countries, the Central and Eastern European region is a territory where such studies have been published only in the last few years. Countries that experienced the collapse of socialism a quarter-century ago still need to be “discovered” both by the local community of researchers in the field of humanities and

their Western colleagues whose information about the construction of gender and sexuality in the region is still very limited, as Dagmar Herzog finds in her survey<sup>4</sup> on Europe's modern sexuality. No successful generalization can yet be made without deeper knowledge of East European queer history.

Establishing queer studies as a discipline in, for example, Baltic universities, is still only a vision—it could yet take quite a while to achieve. Furthermore, LGBT activism in this region still gathers only small numbers because many LGBT people prefer to remain in their closets and reject political activism and public discussion which would only make them feel even more vulnerable.

This volume is the outcome of an international conference *Queer Narratives in European Cultures* that took place in Riga on June 18, 2015, in Pauls Stradiņš' Museum of the History of Medicine, during Europride 2015, and was organized by the University of Latvia's Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, and the Latvian LGBT association *Mozaika*. We hope this book will illuminate some aspects of Central and Eastern European queer history, at the same time accentuating the connection of this history to the history of other regions of Europe, especially those where debates on queer issues have a longer tradition. We believe such a comparative approach could be useful for other researchers who will continue exploring the themes that our colleagues have raised in the present volume.

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<sup>4</sup> Herzog, Dagmar. *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 220.



**PART I**

**QUEER NARRATIVES IN CONTEMPORARY  
LITERATURE**

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE END OF GAY AND LESBIAN LITERATURE AS A HAPPY END: AN ATTEMPT TO COMPARE DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

MARTIN C. PUTNA

### **Gay and Lesbian Literature as a Historical and Geographical Phenomenon**

Many books have been written about *what* gay and lesbian literature is.<sup>1</sup> Now, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the question of *where* gay and lesbian literature is becomes more relevant. In my opinion the centre for gay and lesbian literature is not in Paris or New York anymore, instead this centre is now in cities like Budapest or Riga.

What I mean by that is that I do not understand gay and lesbian literature (GLL) as a category of literary aesthetics, but rather as a category of literary sociology and anthropology. GLL is an example of “community literature,” or more precisely, it is one of the types of literature cultivated by subcultures in modern and post-modern society. These “community literatures” are not primarily driven by aesthetics, but by a function of community building and of representing the community in the cultural mainstream. In some cases this type of representation can take on a rather missionary accent, in other cases it can take on more of a self-defensive tone, or a combination of both.

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<sup>1</sup> See books by Eve Kosofsky Sedwick (1985), Jonathan Dollimore (1991), Wolfgang Popp (1992), Gregory Woods (1998), Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller (1999) and Martin Putna (2003).

Among these “community literatures” we can find literature by Catholics in a secular society;<sup>2</sup> literature by aristocrats in a civic society;<sup>3</sup> literature by dissidents in a communist regime; GLL in a society that does not include gay and lesbian identity as a legitimate anthropological choice. (I do not want to use the term “heteronormative society,” nor do I want to get caught up in debates about identities in the spirit of queer theory). My academic work has been dealing with several “community literatures” which enables a comparative perspective.

The formation of GLL takes place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century against the backdrop of the formation of gay and lesbian identity (GLI). The literary description of the gay and lesbian topic is used as a vehicle for self-emancipation of the homosexual community within the framework of specific national cultures. The personality and identity of the author is not of primary importance: the works of authors who do not belong to the homosexual community, or who at least do not declare it publicly, are also taken into account as “external” witnesses of the relevance of the topic. GLL gains certain autonomy within the framework of national literature and rediscovers its own history (including works and personalities from earlier periods, long before the establishment of homosexual identity). The literary critics interested in GLL develop methods relevant for academic examination. GLL attracts attention and respect from the “mainstream” of the same national culture. The role of authors and critics who declare their personal engagement with the topic, and with the gay and lesbian movement, is typical in this phase. This process is usually interconnected with the successful fulfilment of the process of political self-emancipation and general acceptance of the homosexual community in the same country.<sup>4</sup>

However, at the same time, gay and lesbian literature is losing its main purpose. It is allowed to end happily and peacefully. So, if the gay or lesbian topic appears in literary works now, it is mainly because of the individual, post-emancipation literary strategies of each particular author. In the Anglo-Saxon and Francophone cultures a status has been reached where gay and lesbian topics are perceived as completely neutral, that is when the presence of gay and lesbian themes, or the GLI of an author, does not influence the critical response to the work in question. Let us

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<sup>2</sup> Putna, M. C. *Česká katolická literatura v kontextech 1918–1945*. Praha: Torst, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Putna, M. C. Homosexualita jako reklama na literaturu aneb Fenomén Georgiev. *Souvislosti*, 21, 3: pp. 16–26.

<sup>4</sup> See Claude J. Summers, *Gay Fictions Wilde to Stonewall* (1990) and Marita Keilson-Lauritz, *Die Geschichte der eigenen Geschichte* (1997).

name just a few authors from recent years: Michael Cunningham, Chuck Palahniuk, and Benoit Duteurtre.

There are other authors who write primarily for the gay and lesbian (GL) community. What they publish, however, is basically trivial erotic fiction to be consumed quickly, or non-fiction (psychological, sexologist, spiritual etc.). The response to this type of literature does not extend beyond the core of the community, because this literature usually does not possess any significant aesthetic value. To differentiate between these two types of authors, I use the following distinctions: “an author who happens to be gay,” and “a gay who happens to be an author.” In practice this means that the works by the authors from the first category can be found both in standard bookstores as well as in bookstores specializing in GLL—whereas works by the authors from the second category can be only found in specialized bookstores.

Now, let us turn our attention to the other part of Europe—to the one that used to be a part of the so-called Soviet bloc. Naturally, the communist regimes did not allow their subjects to participate in the GL emancipation happening in the free Western world. A similar emancipation process started as late as 1989, or 1991 in the countries of the former USSR. In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) the process was quite specific.

On one hand, emancipation had a much easier starting point as local gay and lesbian movements, both political and cultural, had ready-made patterns of working which could be transferred almost completely from the West. This pattern included both the concept of GLL itself and it challenged the status quo by applying queer theory. It included a canon of terms, symbols and political requirements, a canon of classical literary works and literary strategies, and also a growing academic production concerning the GL topic. Subsequently, what arose in CEE is, to a large extent, a translation of Western patterns. It is good to remember that the English language is not only the common academic language, but also the main language of the GL movement and of academic production. In no other language can this topic be discussed as easily and naturally since all the key terms, from “gay” to “same-sex marriage,” are taken from English.

On the other hand, the position of the emancipation process is much more difficult. Not only did the communist era delay the formation of the GL movement, but even before the communist era CEE had slower development in terms of general modernization and secularization than other parts of Europe. It is mainly for those historical reasons that the societies of CEE have been comparably conservative, and not only with respect to the topic of GLI. Moreover, there were forces in these societies

which made the anti-GLI movement into a political tool, intended to appeal to the conservative, less educated strata. In some countries the anti-GLI agenda has become a part of the cultural politics of the state. It is no coincidence that the former centre of the Soviet bloc, namely Moscow, represents the centre of organized homophobia in CEE.

Development in CEE is a part of a development within a broader geopolitical context. A line divides the globe from North to South. West of this line, new laws have been established in more and more countries to protect same-sex partnerships, homosexuality ceases to be regarded as an issue and the same-sex experiences of artists or politicians have become just another item of no particular note in their biographies. East of this line, by contrast, new laws tend to criminalize or re-criminalize homosexuality. Homosexuals are bestowed the role of “scapegoats” historically given to persecuted communities making them magically responsible for all the troubles of these societies.<sup>5</sup> In heathen Rome, Christians were made the scapegoats, and in Christian Europe it was the Jews—in CEE today, it is gays and lesbians.<sup>6</sup> The supposedly Orthodox Russia, the Islamic Near and Middle East and the supposedly Christian black Africa are diverse in the colours of their ideologies, but in their rhetoric they match one another—cursing alleged Western decadence, as seen particularly in GLI. Vladimir Putin’s law prohibiting “homosexual propaganda” is just a soft version of laws in Iran or Uganda, threatening gays and lesbians with the death penalty.

In this context the GL movement and the GLL in the countries of CEE acquire an extraordinary importance. What matters now is exactly where this dividing line will fall. The countries of CEE, or more specifically, the countries between Germany and Russia once again represent a border between ideologies. It is through this seemingly secondary topic that the specific societies symbolically formulate their decision, whether they mentally belong to the West or the East.

In this context GLL in CEE in the last quarter of a century can, and will, be regarded as a whole. The main tendencies which appear in particular national literatures can, and will, be compared. Conversions and diversions can, and will, be stated across the whole vast multinational area

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<sup>5</sup> Girard, René. *The Scapegoat*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Jakobsen, Janet R. Queers Are Like Jews, Aren’t They? Analogy and Alliance Politics, in: Boyarin, Daniel, Itzkowitz, Daniel and Pelegrini, Ann (eds.). *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, pp. 64–89.

of CEE. The result of this comparison can, and will, be not only of purely literary importance.

I am fully aware of the risks of taking a comparative perspective, if the viewpoint is of a representative of one of relevant national literatures. I am also aware of my linguistic limitations: my experience in Slavic studies enables me to read all Slavonic literatures, whereas my knowledge of Hungarian is limited and in Baltic literature I, unfortunately, fully depend on translations. Yet, I firmly believe that it is necessary to make this attempt. If other fellow academics follow it, complete it, and eventually fully transform it, we will all be the better for it.

## The Czech Republic

Let me start with my “home”: Czech literature. Up till 1989 no openly gay author figured in the mainstream of publicly available Czech literature. Those authors desiring to depict a homosexual theme used different literary strategies in the line of duality: “mask” and “signal.”<sup>7</sup> “Paths of Sublimation” meant a transformation and only implicit expression of the topic, either through hermetic, allusive language (like in the poetry of Richard Weiner or Věra Linhartová) or through a substitutive topic (like Jewishness, as related to gayness, in its marginality and persecution, in the work of Ladislav Fuks). “Paths of Stylization” involve open discussion of the topic but in more “acceptable” historic or exotic backgrounds: antiquity in the work of Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, “romantic friendship” set in the milieu of medieval chivalry in the work of Julius Zeyer, imitation of medieval Hebrew homoerotic poetry in the work of Jiří Langer etc.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from mainline Czech culture, a group of authors formed around the first Czech GL activist magazine, issued in the 1930s, in the epoch of the relatively liberal interwar Czechoslovak Republic. However, it was about “homosexuals who happen to be authors,” and thus activists who occasionally became writers. Although the texts by these activists are quality-wise only on the margins of Czech literature of this period, they represent an important period document and also report on the mentality of

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<sup>7</sup> Keilson-Lauritz, Marita. Maske und Signal – Textstrategien der Homoerotik, in: Malria Kalveram, Wolfgang Popp (eds.). *Homosexualitäten – literarisch*. Essen: Blaue Eule, 1991, pp. 63–76.

<sup>8</sup> Lishaugen, Roar. *Speaking with a Forked Tongue. Double Reading Strategies in Romány tři mágů by Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic*. Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2008.

that time.<sup>9</sup> This group, the first self-conscious generation of GLL, was heavily influenced by the example of neighbouring Germany, the homeland of the very first GL movement under the leadership of Magnus Hirschfeld. In the way Czech activists mentally followed German models of this period we can see another example of the “secondary” role of CEE.

When the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 liberated the publishing environment, primarily those GLL texts were published that had been written in the previous Communist era, but had remained as manuscripts or were circulated only in samizdat. Among these texts appeared works by several, usually pseudonymous, “authors of their own coming-out stories,”<sup>10</sup> who have written their coming-out novel, which fulfilled and exhausted their literary activity (though, some of them possessed a genuine lyrical talent, such as pseudonym Jiří Pastýř). Thus they proved to be only “homosexuals who happen to be authors.” Several works by respected authors also appeared which included personally tuned homosexual motifs, but which were intentionally left aside by their authors. This was, for instance, the case of the lyrical poetry of the well-known dramatist Josef Topol, published as late as the 1990s. Josef Topol finally consented to publish his early “private” texts, but definitely did not want to be classified as a writer of GLL and never commented on homosexual topics in his autobiographical texts. At the same time, in the early 1990s, three significant personalities appeared who considered homosexuality to be main topic of their work.

The first one was Václav Jamek, primarily a bilingual intellectual-philologist, closely connected with French culture not only as a translator, but also as a Francophone writer. Being formed more in the French than in the Czech literary context, Jamek’s literary work probably represented the first example of a “Path of Manifestation” in Czech literature, which meant an open, “realistic” discussion of the topic, combined with gay activism. Jamek published, *inter alia*, the very first Czech attempt at a homosexual topic in European literature.<sup>11</sup>

In his essay *Krvavčí múza* (*Raven’s Muse*, written 1976–1977, published 1992) he expressed his will to leave his Czech work unpublished rather than to have its homoerotic dimension censored, calling

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<sup>9</sup> Lishaugen, Roar and Seidl, Jan. Generace Hlasu. Česká meziválečná literatura a její tvůrci, in: M. C. Putna (ed.). *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury*. Praha: Academia, 2011, pp. 209–280.

<sup>10</sup> McNaron, Toni. Coming Out Stories, in: Summers, Claude J. (ed.). *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*. New York: Henry Holt Company, 1995, pp. 173–175.

<sup>11</sup> Jamek, Václav. *O prašivém houfci. Literatura, homosexualita, AIDS*. Praha: Torst, 2001.

himself “the impossibilist.”<sup>12</sup> This work contains many genres and various styles: absurd drama, “French” purist philological criticism, grotesque parodic poetry. In Jamek’s perception, the homosexual experience itself is often grotesque, specifically in its marginalization in Communist society. Yet even in this grotesqueness it is worth defending and should be brought into literary speech. This emphasized grotesqueness, the bizarre aspect of the homosexual lifestyle—and through this prism the grotesqueness and bizarreness of the whole world—loosely connects Jamek with the archetypical Czech tradition of Hašek and Hrabal. Similarly, as in the works of Hašek or Hrabal, the depiction of seemingly trivial, popular and vulgar environments veil the author’s sophisticated cultural background. Yet, in contrast to Hašek and Hrabal, Jamek is not primarily a born narrator, but a critical and sceptical intellectual. Symptomatically, in the Czech literature of the 1990s, Jamek has been designated *the* gay author, respected by the broader cultural public. In fact, he was more respected than popular. In this respect it seems as if in the 1990s Czech society wished to prove to itself its tolerance: Behold, we can accept one homosexual author in our midst.

The second openly gay author is an entirely different personality in many respects: Jiří Kuběna expresses both the crucial meaning of gay love for his poetry and his distance from modern European GLI and GLL. Homosexuality is omnipresent in his autobiographically tuned work, but entirely separated from the usual problems of homosexuals in modern society. Homosexuality is elevated to a mythical level: in a happy relationship between two contemporary men Antiquity is revitalized—the utopic Golden Age of mythological couples. “Profane” society has no access to this happiness, to this living-in-Greece. This insularity is an intentional poetic choice. At the same time, it has been made possible by the exceptional opportunities the author has had. Kuběna is a professional conservationist. He spent most of the Communist era in castles. He transformed one castle in his region of South Moravia, Bítov, into a central point of his personal mythology, into an idealized “castle of male love,” praised in sophisticated rhetorical poetry, which is both classical and experimental in the style of the late avant-garde.<sup>13</sup>

To make Kuběna’s case even more complex, not only homosexuality and Antiquity, but also Catholicism belong to his mytho-poetic system. Kuběna’s Catholicism is culturally extremely conservative (see his

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<sup>12</sup> Jamek, Václav. *Krkavčí múza*. Praha: Odeon, 1992, pp. 20–21.

<sup>13</sup> Putna, M. C. Jsme věční, jen když nejsme sami, in Jiří Kuběna, *Jiný Vesmír. Juvenilia*. Brno: Vetus Via, 2003, pp. 1035–1045; Putna, M. C. Cesty k Bítovu, in: Jiří Kuběna, *Pramen Bítova*. Brno: Host, 2011, pp. 281–290.

rejection of the Second Vatican Council)—but also extremely audacious in re-interpretation: Holy Maria is for Kuběna the patron saint of gay love; Jesus and John are a mythological gay couple; the spear of Longinus serves as a phallic symbol; the first couple in Paradise was originally male, and the punishment of “the other Adam” consisted in his castration—in his transformation into a woman.

To the Czech public Jiří Kuběna seemed an extremely exotic phenomenon. It took the whole of the 1990s for him to be accepted as a legitimate author. However, non-literary circumstances made this acceptance possible. Firstly, Kuběna was a close childhood friend of Václav Havel, who repeatedly defended Kuběna’s person and work. Secondly, Kuběna, as warden of the Bítov castle, organized grandiose congresses of poets, in which all the mainstream Czech literary figures—after some hesitation—took part. Thanks to the immediate contact with the fascinating eccentric personality of the poet-warden-rhetorician, the Czech literary public found a way to his poetry. Ironically, this poet’s later poetry is increasingly more verbose and less and less appealing—unlike the poetry of his youth, written in complete isolation.

The third personality, Svatava Antošová, started her career in the last years of Communism as a Beatnik-style poet. However, she reached her literary peak in fiction, written in a post-Communist era, in novels *Dáma a švihadlo* (*The Lady and the Jump Rope*, 2004) and *Nordickou blondýnu jsem nikdy nelízala* (*I Have Never Gone Down on a Nordic Blonde*, 2005). In these novels, Antošová turns all the stereotypes about homosexual inspiration in literature upside down. Instead of sadness and pathos, she writes a “lesbian-killer parody with some elements of autobiography” and “grotesque porn from the terrorism era,” which are the subtitles of two of her novels. Her novels are built on the writer’s familiarity with a raw “post-underground” environment of industrial North Bohemia, characterized by post-Communist poverty, worker’s pubs, and little islands of cultural creativity. However, the text flows freely from critical realism to sexual and violent phantasies, nevertheless still full of absurd humour. Both the “external” environment and the “internal” GL milieu are made into objects of mockery. The authorial voice says about a fellow lesbian: “Píča! Pořád chce založit nějakou organizaci, který by mohla šéfovat.” (“This bitch! She is always eager to found an [activist] organization in order to become a boss.”)<sup>14</sup> The quasi-autobiographical person herself is not excluded from this mockery. She comments her performance in a provocative drag-show: “Vypadám jako buzna, transka, agent CIA a Fidel Castro dohromady!” (“I

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<sup>14</sup> Antošová, Svatava. *Dáma a švihadlo*. Olomouc: Votobia, 2004, p. 253.

look like a faggot, trans, agent of CIA and Fidel Castro at the same time!”<sup>15</sup> In real life, Antošová is not only *the* lesbian author of Czech literature, but a known author engaged in many mainline cultural projects, particularly in those of new left political inclination.

Around these three gather many “lesser” authors, of different quality and success. In general, however, it can be said that the homosexual topic was established in the mainstream of Czech literature and gradually lost the distinction of being something provocative or taboo. It is associated both with the liberalization of Czech society and with the success of the Czech GL movement. 2006 was the year of the promulgation of the law about registered partnerships. Symbolically, it can be regarded as the year of the peak and of the end of the main phase of the GL movement and literature. Paradoxically, yet logically, the GLL could end because it had reached its main extra-literary goal.

This situation of “the happy end” has also been sealed in the academic field. An international conference about homosexuality in Czech history and culture took place at Charles University in 2009. Three monographs have been published as an outcome: one about homosexuality in Czech literature and other artistic disciplines; one about the history of GLL in Czech lands; one about sociological and anthropological dimensions of GL communities in Czech lands.<sup>16</sup> Both academia and the broader public accepted these monographs thankfully or with partial scientific criticism, without a hint of scandal. In this way, the phenomenon of the GL movement and GLL have been “historicized.”

Indeed, new writers dealing with homosexual topics continue to appear. But the context has changed. They are authors who are published and who are critically accepted in the literary mainstream, regardless of the topic. They depict homosexuality if they intend to, but do not present it as anything controversial. One example is Františka Jirousová in her novel *Vyhnanci* (*The Exiles*, 2011), where the main plot is the struggle between Catholicism and homosexuality in the life of a group of Czech youths and the main message is the reconciliation of both. The poet Jiří Kuběna appears in the book as an episodic character. Another example is Adam Borzič, editor-in-chief of an important literary magazine, who includes bisexual stylization in his poetry, but whose thematic centre lies elsewhere—in social criticism and in unorthodox spirituality. Neither

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<sup>15</sup> Antošová, Svatava. *Nordickou blondýnu jsem nikdy nelízala*. Praha: Concordia, 2005, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup> Seidl, Jan. *Od oltáře k oltáři*. Brno: Host, 2012; Himl, Pavel, Seidl, Jan and Schindler, Franz (eds.). *Miluji tvory svého pohlaví. Homosexualita v dějinách a společnosti českých zemí*. Praha: Argo, 2013.

Jirousová nor Borzič are considered to be “homosexual authors.” Through their work and its critical response they confirm a surprising fact: if there is any specific accent in Czech literature with a gay topic, it is its connection to Catholicism or, more generally, to Christian (or Jewish) religiosity. The religiosity appears not as a virulent opponent, but as a spiritual background and driving force of gay characters and/or authors.

Or, another type of writer appears: those who emphasize that they are “gay authors.” However, what they produce is merely commercial, entertaining literature (Jan Fohný and his short stories *Buzičci* [*The Little Faggots*], 2013), or a foiled scandal. The last is the case of wannabe controversial writer Adam Georgiev. Georgiev published a series of half-pornographic novels with immense literary ambition and extraordinary self-promotion, but with a lack of literary talent. Czech critics mentioned him because of his topic, but after some hesitation they had to state that he was a bad writer.<sup>17</sup> This was said as if it were an excuse: We have to reject him, even though he is gay. The Georgiev case proves that homosexuality can be used as an advertising tool for literature in contemporary Czech culture, but that this advertising tool is ceasing to work.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the Georgiev case proves as well that the Czech GLL really did end happily.

## Slovenia

Let us move to Slovenia. Former Yugoslavia used to be comparatively the most liberal country under a Communist regime and in the frame of Yugoslavia, Slovenia used to be the most liberal part of it, having the closest links to Western Europe. Similarly, the situation of the local GL movement and of GLL started by following Western patterns. While the Czech scene started with the publication of local literary works, written during the Communist era, and finished with the academic “historicization” of local traditions, the opposite was the case in Slovenia. In Slovenia the scene started with the translation of Western GLL and cultural theory. In the very beginning of the free era, starting in 1990, the independent prestigious publishing house ŠKUC launched the *Lambda* series. From that time on, *Lambda* has primarily been publishing translations of Western authors from the GLL canon (Michel Foucault, Konstantinos Kavafis, Judith Butler, Adrienne Rich, Leslie Feinberg and others), with the financial help of the Slovenian state.

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<sup>17</sup> Suk, Jan. „PR v českém pekle,” *Host*, 2013, 24, 4, p. 75.

<sup>18</sup> Putna, M. C. Homosexualita jako reklama na literaturu aneb Fenomén Georgiev. *Souvislosti* 21, 3, pp. 16–26.

Naturally, this ambitious plan of translating the GLL canon should serve as encouragement for Slovenian creativity, both artistic and academic.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, two of the founding personalities of *Lambda* Suzana Tratnik and Brane Mozetič, were at the same time editors, translators, literary historians, political activists, and writers. A typical trace of Slovenian culture reappears in this “accumulation of functions,” which, even with a small number of culture bearers, tried from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards to embrace all the main tendencies and genres of period European culture.

Tratnik and Mozetič, therefore, attempt to re-construct the Slovenian branch of GLL. In her monograph *Lezbična zgodba—literarna konstrukcija seksualnosti* (*A Lesbian Story—Literary Construction of Sexuality*, 2004) Tratnik summarizes Western theories about “female writing” and “lesbian texts” in order to apply them to a very few works with (potentially) lesbian topics, which she found not only in Slovenian, but in South-Slavic literatures in general.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, but with less scholarly sophistication, Mozetič tries to gather all homosexual narratives in Slovenian literature. His anthology, *Modra Svetloba. Homoerotična ljubezen ve slovenski literaturi* (*The Blue Light. Homoerotic Love in Slovenian Literature*, 1990), was featured in the very first issue of *Lambda*. The introduction indicates an openly activist, even “didactic” purpose of the anthology: “Vzemi v roke dobre knjige [...] Zavedaj, da nesi sam.” (“Take a good book in your hand [...] See, you are not alone.”)

The anthology starts with several narratives from Slovenian modernism which could be classified as examples of “romantic friendship.” In only one case is Mozetič able to find a “real,” developed story of a homosexual relationship as the central plot of a novel by the almost forgotten author, France Novšak, *Dečki* (*Boys*, 1938).<sup>21</sup> In other cases, Mozetič has to be satisfied with marginal episodes, often depicted in a rather negative way. Only in the newest literature can a positive, or at least a neutral, approach be found. Mozetič wants to show the Slovenian scene as broadly as possible. This is why he also includes highly problematic persons and/or texts, such as Vitan Mal. This author published “normal” youth literature

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<sup>19</sup> Tratnik, Suzana. Translation Trouble. Translating sexual identity into Slovenian, in: Brian James Baer (ed.). *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexs. Literary Translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*. Amsterdam – Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2011, pp. 137–146.

<sup>20</sup> Tratnik, Suzana. *Lezbična zgodba – literarna konstrukcija seksualnosti*. Ljubljana: Škuc, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Zavrl, Andrej. Dečki med erotiko in moralo: telo, spol in spolnost v prvem slovenskem homoerotičnem romanu. *Jezik in slovstvo*, 2009, 54, 5, pp. 31–40.

under his real name, and ephebophilic pornography under the pseudonym Ino Knabino.

Among recent authors collected into Mozetič's anthology, the most significant name is Tomaž Šalamun. Šalamun is a poet, biographically connected to America, who introduced an "American" touch into Slovenian poetry. Sentimental relationships with male friends appear among many other motifs in Šalamun's verses. However, Šalamun distanced himself from being labelled too explicitly as a "gay poet." Mozetič commented on this distance with bitterness.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, Mozetič was able to persuade Ciril Bergles, a respected translator of the older literary generation, to publish, after some hesitation, his own homoerotic verse. Thus Bergles became the third representative local author of the *Lambda* edition. Mozetič did not, however, support the cultural traditionalism and religious tones in Bergles' meditative poetry: "Rad me je drezal s svojo religiozno liriko ali s prevodi take lirike, saj je poznal moje odklonilno stališče do vere." ("He liked to tease me with his religious poetry or with translations of such poetry, although he knew about my negative attitude to the faith.")<sup>23</sup>

The editorial and interpretative work of Tratnik and Mozetič were designed primarily for a domestic audience and for the increasing visibility of the GL topic on the Slovenian scene. Interestingly, their poetic and fictional work has become the most important and most broadly translated "export article." What specific, personal and/or Slovenian influences do *the* Slovenian gay poet and *the* Slovenian lesbian writer introduce to the Western general patterns?

In the work of Suzana Tratnik we can observe the ways in which she introduces gender concepts from her academic work into her fiction. The hero of her most successful novel, *Ime mi je Damian* (*My Name is Damian*, 2001), deals with rough teenage life, *Trainspotting*-style, using the male gender. Gradually it becomes evident that Damian is biologically a woman. Her novel, *Tretji svet* (*The Third World*, 2007), however, might be regarded as more originally "Slovenian." This is because the main plot consists of the meeting and confrontation of two cultural mentalities: a Slovenian heroine is given the possibility of attending an international lesbian congress in Switzerland in the last years of the Communist era. She has been both enchanted by the self-consciousness of modern lesbian identity as well as confused by some patterns which she is expected to

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<sup>22</sup> Mozetič, Brane. In memoriam Tomaž Šalamun. <http://www.narobe.si/blog-mobile/myblog/in-memorial-tomaz-salamon> (11.05.2015).

<sup>23</sup> Mozetič, Brane 2013. In memoriam Ciril Bergles, <http://www.narobe.si/stevilka-26/narobe-26/in-memorial/in-memorial-ciril-bergles-1934-2013> (11.05.2015).

follow that she finds too complex (e.g. the racial question in the lesbian scene). Her mental world suddenly comes across as “third world”—underdeveloped, and in need of advice and help. It is due to this confrontation that the heroine decides to build a lesbian movement in Slovenia. This confrontation also gives rise to many humorous and grotesque scenes which give another level to the novel. Suzana Tratnik at the same time describes and promotes lesbian activism, similar to Svatava Antořová in the Czech Republic.

The vast literary work of Brane Mozetič, on the other hand, does not deal with political or gender questions. Its only subject is sex, often coupled with violence and drugs. Mozetič’s texts are “cruising texts”; in form—not marching from a beginning to an end, but stumbling in endless circles; in content—depicting monotonous and polyvalent, anonymous and cruel, “cruising” sexual relations.<sup>24</sup> Mozetič has proven to be a studious disciple of the Classics which he has translated, particularly the masters of “cruel erotics” like Foucault or Genet. The example of Genet shows that it is possible to create great literature from this subject. However, Mozetič’s problem lies in the banality not only of his stories (see volume *Banalite* [*Banalities*], 2003), but also of his language. It is “pornographic” in the metaphoric sense—banal, flat, monotonous, tiresome descriptions of corporal organs, acts, and fluids. Perhaps the only original motif in Mozetič’s work is how he paints Ljubljana as a city of darkness and of drastic sexuality, clearly reminiscent of Genet’s Paris: “Ljubljana is as bad as a nightmare.”<sup>25</sup> Ljubljana figures in Slovenian tradition as a “locus amoenus,” an idyllic place of sleepy provincial beauty. Mozetič’s “re-labelling” of Ljubljana makes sense only as an intentional “anti-myth.”

Regarding the problematic quality of Mozetič’s texts, it is awe-inspiring to observe how firm his position in the Slovenian literary scene is. The reason is mainly extra-literary: Mozetič is not only *the* gay writer, and the organizer and supporter of young “gay poets,” but also a functionary of the Slovenian literary association. It is as if the Slovenian literary scene feels afraid to criticize him properly in order to not run the risk of criticizing his gay identity which he so loudly emphasizes.

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<sup>24</sup> Vollhaber, Thomas. *Das Nichts. Die Angst. Die Erfahrung*. Berlin: Rosa Winkel, 1987; Worton, Michael. Cruising (Throughs) Encounters, in: Heathcote, Owen, Hughes, Alex and Williams, James S. (eds.). *Gay Signatures. Gay and Lesbian Theory, Fiction and Film in France*. Oxford – New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1998, pp. 29–49.

<sup>25</sup> Mozetič, Brane. *Banalite*. Zábřeh: Adolescent, 2011, p. 68.

There is a paradox: although Slovenian gay cultural personalities complain about persistent homophobia, even if “soft” and hidden,<sup>26</sup> on the public level, Slovenian society has liberalized itself to a great extent. This positive development was sealed by the promulgation of registered partnerships (2006) and same-sex marriage (2015), but on the Slovenian literary scene a specific vision of GLL, dating back to the 1990s, has been conserved through the dominant position of Mozetič. It is this “living classic” who, thanks to his influence and his status as “*the gay author*,” unintentionally obstructs the Slovenian GLL from maturing—and from being allowed its happy ending.

## Hungary

Hungary in the Communist era was also a country comparatively open to Western culture, even if to a lesser extent than Slovenia. Concerning GLL, however, after 1989 it became apparent that Hungary possessed neither a treasure of texts written originally for *samizdat*, as was the case in the Czech Republic, nor a group of dedicated intellectual activists/writers or pronounced state support as in Slovenia. It was only during the 1990s that several poets who openly dealt with gay topics appeared, and who did not repudiate the “gay poet” label. The most significant among these are András Gerevich and Ádám Nádasy.<sup>27</sup> Typically, quotes on book covers of English translations of Nádasy say that he is “not to be categorized narrowly as a fine gay poet, which he undoubtedly is.”<sup>28</sup>

András Gerevich is one generation younger than Nádasy, but it is he who shall be discussed first because he represents a more typical approach of modern poets dealing with homosexuality. Several levels are present in his cultivated, melancholy, lyrical poetry. One level can be found in motifs of transience, of fleeting sentimental meetings and partings, and of death covertly approaching, which are omnipresent. This tonality corresponds with the mainstream tradition of Hungarian literature, also found in texts by authors like the “Hungarian Proust” Gyula Krúdy. One of the poems that exemplify Gerevich’s tonality is a poem about meeting a shy teenager dreaming of his life-long love, while the narrator sees in the boy his own, younger and purer “Self.” Another level is a unified commercial pop

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<sup>26</sup> Košir, Manca. *Drugačna razmerja*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga Založba, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Nádasy, Ádám, Whyte, C. and Gerevich, A. 2009. Self-censorship and pantheism: An interview. [http://www.hlo.hu/news/self\\_censorship\\_and\\_pantheism](http://www.hlo.hu/news/self_censorship_and_pantheism) (11.05.2015).

<sup>28</sup> Nádasy, Ádám. *Take down his particulars. Poems 1984–2010*. Budapest: Corvina, 2012.

culture, including gay pop culture. Gerevich sets several poems in night clubs or in fitness centres. One can ask whether something as anti-poetic and banal as a fitness centre can be the subject of a poem unless an ironic distance is present. Yes, apparently it can be, as seen in Gerevich's poem *California Sun Fitness*. Symbolically, the Hungarian poem has an English title. A third level is a confrontation between the lost world of childhood mingling with religion in the Hungarian countryside—conservative, but emotionally attractive nonetheless—and the experience of a multicultural, particularly Anglo-Saxon, West. The West is also a place of sentimental disappointment, but not of social alienation. For instance, the American “gay resort,” Provincetown, appears as a “locus amoenus,” where men kiss each other in the presence of families with children. In this third sense, Gerevich's poetry is also political poetry. Usually this political engagement is only implicit. It is the dream that Hungary could one day be transformed into a “Provincetown,” where gays would not feel social alienation. Occasionally Gerevich is explicit in his criticism, for instance, when he quotes a homophobic and anti-Semitic saying of the Hungarian far right: “A buzikat a Dunába, a zsidókat meg utána,” (“Chuck the faggots into the Danube, and then the Jews.”)<sup>29</sup>

Ádám Nádasy is much more rooted in pre-modern culture; he is a philologist-Anglicist. His poetry contains numerous allusions to classical European literature and formally follows classical patterns like sonnets or hexameters (but with less experimentation than e.g. Jiří Kuběna). The basic tonality is melancholy, similar to Gerevich, and the feeling of alienation is even stronger than in Gerevich's work. In Nádasy's work, the alienation from the Catholic, religious world plays a particular role (see the poem *Éjféli mise* [*A Midnight Mass*]). In Nádasy's case Catholicism is also a part of “class identity,” since he is a member of a historically aristocratic Hungarian family. Nádasy's poetry is also even more impressionistic than Gerevich's, focusing on details in form and sensation. Last but not least, his eroticism is verbally even more chaste than Gerevich's.

Nádasy's eroticism actually follows the tradition of the sublime, “platonic” eroticism that early modernism inherits (Thomas Mann, R. M. Rilke) among other examples see repeated motifs comparing a young man to a Greek sculpture. At the same time, Nádasy unmasks this tradition: he demonstrates how “literal” carnal eroticism is always present under the sublime platonicism. The carnal eroticism is, however, neither tragic nor

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<sup>29</sup> Gerevich, András. *Teiresias' Geständnisse*. Stuttgart: Edition Solitude, 2013, p. 82.

embarrassing. It is just a hidden level of humanity. Gay identity is nothing too specific in this context, it just offers some more refined sensitivity, see the poem *Udvarlás hűvös ősszel* (*Courting in the Autumn Hall*). For a young man the lyrical protagonist assumes the role of a glamorous charming intellectual, but he is aware that the mask is:

not the real me  
 (that comes later, one foggy, snow-smudged evening)  
 as if I had no lips, and he no body.<sup>30</sup>

Nádasdy's work is crucial not only for his own sake, not only for his mastery of melancholic poetics, but it is crucial for understanding deeper Hungarian traditions. Explicit declarations of homosexual identity in the modern sense are quite rare in Hungary. (Paradoxically, it was a Hungarian writer, Károly Mária Kertbény, who invented the word "homosexual," though the word spread through German culture.) It was, however, a young literary scientist, Zoltán Csehy, who proved that the "stronger" is something else: regarding the extremely "masculine," aristocratic and military culture of the country, there is a very strong tradition of homosociality, often very sentimental male bonding in the spirit of "romantic friendship."<sup>31</sup> This concept of homosociality—or, "what existed before homosexuality"—was invented within the frame of Western "constructionism."<sup>32</sup> Czech academia just briefly suggested that this concept deserves to be applied to CEE as well.<sup>33</sup> Hungarian academia already realized this application. The detailed monograph, *Szodoma és környéke: Homoszocialitás, barátságretorika és queer irányulások a magyar költészetben* (*Sodom and Environs: Homosociality, Rhetorics of Friendship and Queer Orientation in Hungarian Poetry*, 2014), primarily explores pre-modern and classical Hungarian literature. Csehy traces the mental and poetic paths leading to these first self-consciously "gay poets," typical for their melancholy impressionism and undemonstrative eroticism, although the tonality of provocative eroticism to the pornographic also

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<sup>30</sup> Nádasdy, Ádám. *Take down his particulars*, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> Nissen, Axel. *Romantic Friendship Reader*. Boston, Northeastern, 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Halperin, David. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990; Bravmann, Scott. *Queer Fictions of the Past*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

<sup>33</sup> Putna, M. C. Sodomité, duchovní přátelé a amazonky aneb Co bylo, když homosexualita ještě nebyla, in M. C. Putna (ed.). *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury*. Praha: Academia, 2011, pp. 65–82.

exists in Hungarian poetry (see the volume of János Rosmer *Hátsó ülés (Rear Seat)*, 2010)).

Csehy's monograph focuses only on poetry. The best proof of the continuity between the pre-modern homosocial poetics and modern homosexuality, however, can be found in fiction, namely in the work of one of the internationally best known Hungarian writers, Péter Nádas. In his post-modern novel, *Emlékiratok könyve (Book of Memories)*, 1986), the motto, taken from John's gospel, "But he spake of the temple of his body" (2:21), indicates that the subject of the novel is the human body. Not sexuality specifically, but a body: perception of one's own and others' bodies, and also the language of the body, more eloquent than words. In the frame of this "corporeal" knowledge and understanding, homosexual experience is also perceived to be a part of general human experience, as a sharpened version of truly natural and omnipresent sentimental bonding among males. The "homosexual" hero does not feel alienation from other males, he just more intensively experiences the all-male brotherhood, the homosociality, naturally present in the symbol of a joyfully erect phallus. Love for the same sex has an aspect of brotherhood. All males are brothers; and male-loving males are doubly brothers.<sup>34</sup>

In his newest work, *Párhuzamos történetek (Paralel Stories)*, 2005),<sup>35</sup> Nádas follows this vision of spontaneous male-to-male intimacy, among other motifs, but also shows homosexual subculture in its extreme, repulsive, pornographic form. One of the characters plunges into nightly homosexual orgies on Margaret Island in Budapest. These orgies are depicted with the same accuracy as heterosexual scenes, but also with the narrator's intention to reach the depths of human experience, in this way regaining full humanity: "He enjoyed the horror of his body. [...] Pleasure is probably one of God's attributes."<sup>36</sup> This "dark side of Budapest" may remind us of the "dark side of Ljubljana," depicted by Mozetič, but there are two main differences. Firstly, it is only one of many facets of human corporeal experience, according to Nádas. Secondly, Nádas's description of the orgy is a masterpiece of colourful language and excited style.

Thus, Hungarian literature is a literature of paradoxes. Péter Nádas is undoubtedly the most famous of all the Hungarian, Slovenian and Czech writers named so far. Homosexuality represents one of the central subjects of his work. The work can be read also as an apology for the "naturalness" of homosexual experience, and yet Nádas cannot be categorized as a "gay

<sup>34</sup> Nádas, Péter. *Kniha paměti*. Praha: Mladá fronta, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Pospíšil, Ivo. Několik poznámek k paralelním příběhům Pétera Nádase. *Slavica litteraria* 14, 2011, 1, pp. 77–85.

<sup>36</sup> Nádas, Péter. *Paralelné príbehy*. Bratislava: Kalligram, 2009.